



Mining Accident News No.1101

1 to 10 January 2011

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Saturday 1 January 2011

Zambia: Rock crushes miner to death

Extract from lusakatimes.com, Zambia

A THIRTY-year-old miner in Chambishi has died in an underground accident, Copperbelt police chief Martin Malama has said.

Dr Malama said yesterday that Frank Lisulo of house number 24, Lukenge Way in Chambishi Township, who was during the night shift, was found dead yesterday morning after a rock fall at the Non-Ferrous Mining Company of Africa-run mine.

He said the next of kin had been informed and that Lisulo's body was at Sinozam Friendship Hospital in Kitwe.

"Mr Lisulo was working night shift at 900 metres below ground level of NFCA. While working at the shaft, we have been informed that there was a rock fall which resulted in his death. His body was found this morning," Dr Malama said.



[Chambishi Copper Mine](#)

Meanwhile, police in Kalulushi have impounded a truck laden with an undisclosed tonnage of copper concentrates suspected to have been stolen from Chibuluma Mine.

Dr Malama said the driver of the truck had been detained to help with investigations.

NOTE: Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual sender, and are not necessarily the views of Industry & Investment NSW.

Editor: Mark Freeman
e mark.freeman@industry.nsw.gov.au

India: One killed in coal mine accident in Jharkhand district

Dhanbad (Jharkhand), (PTI) One miner was killed and four others injured in a mine of Tata Sijua colliery of Tata Steel near here, police said today.

Israr Ahmed died last night when a stowing barricade broke during drilling in seam number 10 of the mine and he, along with four others, were buried under sand.

The other three persons were rescued from the sand heap and admitted to Jamadova Hospital.

Two miners were released after first aid.

R K Jain, manger of Tata Sijua colliery, told reporters after visiting the spot last night that the rest of the miners were safe and those admitted in hospital were out of danger.

This week in mining accident history (1)

2 January 2006

Sago Mine

Tallmansville, West Virginia, USA

Underground coal mine

12 killed by carbon monoxide

Source: www.usmra.com

The **Sago Mine disaster** was a coal mine explosion on January 2, 2006, in the Sago Mine in Sago, West Virginia, USA near the Upshur County seat of Buckhannon. The blast and ensuing aftermath trapped 13 miners for nearly two days with only one miner surviving. It was the worst mining disaster in the United States since the Jim Walter Resources Mine Disaster in Alabama on September 23, 2001, killed 13 people, and the worst disaster in West Virginia since the 1968 Farmington Mine Disaster that killed 78 people.

The disaster received extensive news coverage in the media worldwide. After mining officials released incorrect information, many media outlets, including the *New York Times* reported that 12 survivors had been found alive, when, in

fact, only one of the thirteen trapped miners survived.

On January 2, 2006, an explosion occurred at approximately 6:26 a.m. in Wolf Run Mining Company's Sago Mine. At the time of the explosion, 29 miners were underground. Twelve miners lost their lives, and one was seriously injured. The explosion occurred inby the 2 North Mains seals, and destroyed all ten of the seals used to separate the area from the active portion of the mine.



Overview from MSHA Fatal Accident Report, 9 May 2007

The weather conditions at the mine were unseasonably warm with the temperature near 45 degrees Fahrenheit (F). A storm, accompanied by heavy rain, thunder and lightning, was in the area. Before entering the mine, some Sago miners saw lightning strikes near the property.

A preshift examination of the mine had been conducted. One mine examiner remained underground. The 2nd Left Parallel crew and another miner entered the mine at about 6:00 a.m. The 1st Left crew and three other miners entered the mine shortly thereafter. The 2nd Left Parallel crew arrived on their working section, and the 1st Left mantrip arrived at the 1st Left switch. Shortly thereafter, an explosion occurred.

One miner died of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning shortly after the explosion.

The 2nd Left Parallel miners' attempt to evacuate was unsuccessful, and they barricaded themselves on the 2nd Left Parallel section. All other miners eventually evacuated the mine.

Mine management officials entered the mine in an attempt to assess the situation.

The 1st Left Foreman remained underground and eventually joined this group.

They found that the explosion damaged ventilation controls. In an effort to reach the missing miners, they attempted to restore ventilation, using temporary ventilation controls. They were unable to clear the smoke and gases, and eventually ended their rescue attempt and evacuated the mine.

Federal and state agencies responded to the accident. Mine rescue teams were organized, a command centre was established, and a rescue effort was initiated.

Entry into the mine was delayed because of elevated levels of CO and methane.

Preparations were started to drill a borehole into the 2nd Left Parallel section for sampling and communications purposes.

Rescue teams entered the mine after the concentration of gases stabilized. They found the first victim on January 3, near the 2nd Left Parallel track switch. Later that evening, rescue teams advanced into the 2nd Left Parallel section where twelve miners were found behind a barricade. One miner was found alive. He was rescued and transported to a hospital. On January 4, the 12 victims were recovered from the mine.

Working with the West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training (WVMHS&T), the mine operator, and miners' representatives, the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) launched an investigation into the events surrounding the fatal accident. The investigative team interviewed people with knowledge of the mine or the accident. Investigators mapped the mine, reviewed mine records and gathered

relevant physical evidence from underground. The evidence was evaluated.

Investigators determined that methane began to accumulate within an area which had previously been mined and then sealed with 40 inch thick Omega block seals. The explosion occurred within the sealed area and destroyed the seals. This caused portions of the mine to fill with toxic levels of CO. At MSHA's request, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) conducted a full-scale testing program designed to determine the strength of the Omega block seals and to gather information about explosions in sealed areas. The mine operator failed to build the seals in accordance with the approved plan. However, the testing showed that the seals, as built at the mine, would likely have withstood pressures of 20 pounds per square inch (psi), as required by regulation. The explosion in the mine is believed to have generated pressures in excess of 93 psi. The discrepancies between the actual seal construction and the approved plan, as well as all other non-contributory conditions observed during the investigation, were cited under a separate inspection activity.

MSHA collected Self-Contained Self Rescuer units (SCSRs) used by the miners, and tested them. The mine operator did not keep adequate records on all of the units, and one unit was out-of-date. Some of the miners had trouble donning their SCSRs and breathing through them. However, testing indicated that the units produced oxygen as intended.

Investigators determined that coal dust did not play a major role in the explosion. Potential ignition sources were investigated. There was no evidence that cutting, welding, mining operations, smoking, or spontaneous combustion were involved in the ignition. Electrical systems and equipment were also ruled out as possible ignition sources. Although a roof fall cannot be definitively excluded as a potential ignition source, it is a highly unlikely ignition source.

Lightning strikes were recorded near the mine at approximately the same time as a seismic event occurring in the area and the initial alarm from the mine's atmospheric monitoring system (AMS). MSHA contracted with Sandia Corporation, the operator of the Sandia National Laboratories (Sandia), to perform modeling and testing to ascertain if it was possible for lightning to cause electrical energy to enter the mine and cause an explosion. Sandia determined that a lightning strike could create enough energy in the sealed area to initiate an arc. **Lightning has been determined to be the most likely ignition source.**

Findings on possible causes

Lightning strike and seismic activity

Weatherbug, a Germantown, MD-headquartered weather tracking system reported on January 6, 2006, that, "the evidence suggests that the lightning strike could have caused the explosion due to the correlation between the timing and location of the lightning strike and seismic activity."

The company's equipment detected 100 lightning strikes in the region within 40 minutes of the explosion. A single, powerful lightning strike registered at or near the mouth of the Sago mine at 6:26:36 a.m. This strike held a particularly strong positive charge of 35 kAmps. (A typical strike is 22 to 25 kAmps and relatively rare positive strikes tend to be especially destructive.)

Dr. Martin Chapman, PhD, a Virginia Tech research assistant professor, found that two independent sensors recorded a minor seismic event, possibly from the explosion, 2 seconds later at 6:26:38am.

Use of foam rather than concrete seals

In his January 13, 2006, story in the *Charleston Gazette*, "Sago blast area was recently sealed" Ken Ward, Jr., reported that state officials approved the use of "Omega blocks," a dense foam product, to seal the mine, rather than the required concrete blocks. Deputy director of the

West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training told the state board of that group that, "the seals, made with foam, could withstand pressures of five pounds per square inch."

U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration rules seals to be built using "solid concrete blocks" or alternate materials that will withstand 20 pounds per square inch of pressure.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in its report, "Protecting Coal Miners from Gob Explosions through Explosion-Resistant Mine Ventilation Seals (1993–2005)" reported that "without reliable seal designs, miners' lives could be in jeopardy from the consequences of an underground explosion."

NIOSH also noted that in an explosion caused by lightning in a sealed area of the Gary 50 Mine, 4ft (1.2 m) thick pumped cement seals tested by NIOSH and approved by MSHA, "effectively contained the explosion, thereby sparing the miners working nearby."

Proximity with active gas and oil wells

In the January 13, 2006, *Charleston Gazette* story "Gas wells near mine", staff writers Paul J. Nyden and Ken Ward Jr. report that according to just released state mine permit records, at least four natural gas wells were in close proximity to the mine. One appeared to be adjacent to the sealed area where the explosion is believed to have occurred.

Sparks from restarting machinery after holiday

On January 3, 2006, Jeselyn King and Betheny Holstein, writing for the *Wheeling Intelligencer* had written a story "Explosion's Cause Remains Unknown". Former MSHA official Davitt McAteer said restarting operations after a holiday weekend may have caused sparks to ignite an excess buildup of methane gas and coal dust in the mine.

Monday 3 January 2011

USA: McAteer Investigation of UBB Enters New Stage

Extract from West Virginia MetroNews

The man heading up the governor's investigation into the Upper Big Branch Mine explosion will head underground later this week for a look at part of that mine.

Davitt McAteer admits it's slow going with this investigation, but he and his team are being thorough and deliberate when it comes to finding answer for the families of the 29 men killed in the April 5, 2010 blast.

"I think we're moving along as fast as we can," McAteer told MetroNews in a phone interview Monday. "I do recognize the anxiety and the problems the families face particularly on the holidays. It's very sad and something we're conscious of. But we're trying to finish this up."

McAteer says their next order of business is to take a close look at one section of UBB.

"Water was put on the sheer just before the holiday. And that's a question of what sort of condition was that in at the time of the explosion," he said. "That will mean that every major section of the mine has been covered and has been examined by the investigative teams."

McAteer says they're also wrapping up their interviews. He calls it "unfortunate" that several key people, many of them Massey Energy executives, including former chairman and CEO Don Blankenship, refused to answer their questions.

"It is in my experience somewhat unprecedented for that large a number of people to decline to testify when you're really seeking to find the answer to the question of what caused the explosion so that we can prevent it for occurring in another location," McAteer said. "And that's really the purpose of our investigation."

McAteer says the big task ahead is reviewing testimony from nearly 300 interviews along with

the evidence and information they collected from inside the mine. They'll start putting together what amounts to a massive puzzle.

"What you're really doing is looking for a logical explanation of what happened," he said. "Certain factors will become apparent and evident as you go through and some will be more mysterious and more difficult to ascertain."

McAteer says the goal of the independent investigation is to fit the puzzle together and release their report by the end of the first quarter of this year -- around the one-year anniversary of the explosion.

McAteer, who headed up independent investigations into the Sago and Aracoma disasters five years ago, says while this tragedy was much different from the others, they need to find the same kind of conclusion.

"We have not invented new ways to explode coal mines. We're using the same old techniques. And it's how do we make sure that the preventative methods are in place every day in every mine in this state and in the country," he said.

USA: Longtime tug of war on mine safety

Extract from The Washington Post, USA

When Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis appeared before a gathering of coal mine owners in the fall, she signaled a sharp change in the relationship between the mining industry and the federal agency charged with protecting workers.

Inspectors from Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration, she said, will serve as "cops on the beat," patrolling mines to find safety violations. New regulations will force "bad actors to clean up their act." And owners who fail to clean up safety problems will face federal shutdown under a 33-year-old provision that has never been used before, Solis said.

With memories of the nation's worst coal mining accident still fresh - 29 miners died at the Upper Big Branch site in West Virginia in April - the

administration is challenging coal companies to either change their tactics and voluntarily improve safety or face the harshest sanctions the government can impose.

The new push to strengthen enforcement is already encountering resistance, according to longtime watchers of the coal industry, as companies employ the same legal and political strategies they've honed over decades to block federal reforms.

In November, the MSHA went to court to try to force Massey Energy, owner of Upper Big Branch, to fix problems at another mine, which had accumulated 1,952 safety violations. The case was the first in which the MSHA had tried to shutter a mine and force a safety overhaul by using the "pattern of violations" provision (POV) approved by Congress in 1977.

But before the court ruled, Massey once again sidestepped the MSHA, saying it would idle the mine on its own, thus keeping the federal government from taking control of the mine and from interfering with the company's day-to-day operations.

The MSHA says the legal action against Massey is a sign of things to come. Last month, the agency listed 13 mines in danger of shutdown under the POV provision. Massey owns three of them, more than any other operator.

After every major mining accident, said Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), author of a now-stalled coal safety bill, "there is great emotion that pours out for families, for their tragedy, their children and their community. Everyone pledges they will make it safer. But the mine owners, they just wait and let time work and let time erode emotion, and then they come to Washington. They tell members they can't do business this way. They can't make profits this way."

Solis challenged mine owners to stop their long history of resistance. "It's easy to dig in your heels and say it's 'us against them,' the united front of the mining industry against the legislators and the regulators," she said. "It's

what we've seen repeated, time and time again - a disaster happens, the public is outraged, Congress and the regulators propose reform, and industry fights back."

Joseph A. Main was still awaiting Senate confirmation as President Obama's MSHA director in February 2009 when Don Blankenship, then president of Massey, the nation's sixth-largest coal company, asked for a meeting.

An industry stalwart who took the helm of Massey in 1992, Blankenship had effectively guided his company through serious accidents and the regulatory crackdowns that followed. In most tangles with federal regulators, Blankenship - a modern-day version of the old-fashioned coal baron - had held the upper hand.

Blankenship said he met with Main to show the company's willingness to cooperate.

"We discussed the fact that we wanted to be open with them and be their safest coal company, and we wanted to work together," Blankenship said in an interview at Massey offices near Charleston, W.Va., "Nothing came out of that meeting. It was disappointing."

Main, a former miners union executive and mine safety consultant, knew of Massey's troublesome safety record and its reputation for resistance. Two months later, after the explosion at the Upper Big Branch mine, the regulator and the company executive found themselves on a collision course.

The Upper Big Branch explosion led to the usual calls in Congress for mine safety reforms, with hearings documenting Massey's long record of violations at the mine and the ineffectiveness of the MSHA's regulation. Main ordered his inspectors to go into mines for unannounced inspections and liberally cite owners for safety issues.

Main found Massey's mines especially worrisome.

"As we moved forward after Upper Big Branch, and we started to identify mines that were of concern, a lot of Massey mines showed up on the list. It numbered in the teens," Main said in an interview. "We went into one of these mines recently, and the air was so thick with coal dust, you couldn't see the miners who were working there."

With Massey, Main inherited a regulatory challenge that had been building for years. The company's influence had peaked during the presidency of George W. Bush, whose campaign had substantial financial backing from Massey executives. It won a major concession when Bush lifted restrictions on mountaintop removal - the practice of blowing off mountain tops to expose coal seams. Massey is the nation's largest producer of coal through the controversial technique.

Bush's MSHA chief, Dave D. Lauriski, cut the number of mining inspectors by 9 percent and trained the remaining inspectors to think of themselves as "compliance assistance specialists." Citations for major safety issues plummeted.

Massey's approach to federal regulation has been notable for two tactics that, according to critics, allow the company to thwart or skirt safety requirements. First, Massey has persuaded regulators to forgo safety rules on a case-by-case basis. Second, the company routinely contests federal citations in a manner that makes it virtually impossible for the government to force quick safety overhauls in the nation's most hazardous mines.

Under Blankenship, Massey had mastered the art of the regulatory waiver, a way to legally circumvent federal mining laws. The MSHA has approved 30 petitions from Massey to operate its mines outside of safety mandates, more than for any other company. Most were in the past decade.

Eighteen were granted during Blankenship's tenure, five under the Obama administration.

The waivers allow Massey to mine through gas wells, to construct escapeways lower than the legally-mandated five feet and to create fewer ventilation channels to provide miners with clean air.

Massey officials say that many of their mines are old and that different approaches are needed to continue operation. In each petition, Massey used the same language to assure the MSHA "that the proposed alternative method would provide at least the same measure of protection as the mandatory standard."

But the United Mine Workers' safety director, Dennis O'Dell, and President Bill Clinton's MSHA director, J. Davitt McAteer, said the waiver system is one of most dangerous and most exploited loopholes in mine safety law. MSHA mine inspectors and district managers do the on-the-ground reviews of the requests and make the recommendations to agency headquarters. Most of the inspectors and managers come from the industry, O'Dell and McAteer said.

"These are their friends who are coming to them," McAteer said. "And these districts have been run as fiefdoms since the 1920s. You are in Washington, and you don't know the condition of the mine. It's difficult to call things off by the time it arrives on your desk."

Adding to the pressure, he said, members of Congress and their staffs also call and push for the waiver petitions to be approved.

After two men died in 2006 as the result of a conveyor belt catching fire in Massey's Aracoma Alma Mine in Logan County, W.Va., members of Congress questioned why the MSHA had not used its toughest enforcement tool - beginning a crackdown that could close resistant mines after a POV finding.

The reason was fairly simple, although Congress might not have been aware of it. Years earlier, the industry had made it almost impossible to enforce.

In a 1989 hearing in Denver, where the MSHA took testimony from stakeholders to finalize enforcement rules for the POV, representatives of the coal workers union and the industry butted heads over how safety violations should be counted in establishing a pattern under the law.

The union argued that the MSHA should count against a company all "significant and substantial (S&S) citations" - including those still under appeal. Linda Raisovich-Parsons, a UMW safety director, warned that "legal challenges can drag on for years" as companies resist paying fines.

The industry pleaded for fairness. John Caylor, then a safety manager with Cypress Coal, said there was no attempt by companies "to avoid a pattern. Such comment is not realistic." (Caylor later became Lauriski's deputy at the MSHA.)

The MSHA sided with industry. Contested citations would not count toward the pattern. As long as they were still in the contested category, the government would have a much harder time proving the pattern of violations needed to give federal regulators the authority to order swift safety reforms.

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To cope, Labor lawyers forged an unusual agreement with Massey in September 2006. They asked the company to hold off contesting cases until agency lawyers had determined the potential financial penalty for each violation. Under the deal, Massey was allowed to contest citations long after the 90-day deadline had passed.

No other company was offered this deal, Labor and MSHA officials confirmed.

In response to questions from The Washington Post, the solicitor's office for the Labor Department said that at first the agreement lightened the department's caseload - but the relief was short-lived. Soon, Massey revived its practice of immediately contesting violations, bogging down the system with paperwork.

Shortly after Obama took office, the Labor Department rescinded the arrangement, saying that Massey had "started using the agreement for purposes beyond what it was intended." Massey said in a written statement: "We entered into an informal agreement to alleviate these burdens, while still protecting our rights."

The company also said it does not believe it was abusing the agreement, which it entered at the government's request.

For some at the front lines of coal mining reform, Massey's tactics fit a pattern of industry resistance that goes back decades. Ken Hechler, who is 96, has pushed for industry accountability since his days as a West Virginia Democratic congressman, when he was one of the architects of major 1969 mine safety reform.



Former West Virginia congressman Ken Hechler, 96, was one of the architects of major 1969 mine safety reform. (Katherine Frey)

He remembers being confronted by a group of widows in 1968 just outside the mouth of West Virginia's Consol No. 9 mine, where 78 miners died in an underground explosion.

"They stuck their finger in my chest and said: 'You're a congressman. Why don't you DO something?' " Hechler said in an interview. "It was a defining moment. People were fed up."

Since then, he has joined the protest outside Massey operations in West Virginia to oppose its practice of mountaintop removal. And he watched in horror as the bodies were hauled out of Upper Big Branch, a mine with such an extensive safety violation record that he does not understand why regulators did not step in.

None of it would have happened, he says, if regulators had enforced the law.

"Those 29 men would be alive today," he said.

Much of Massey's resistance, safety advocates contend, was guided by Blankenship, who retired Friday. The company aggressively fought the MSHA until the end of his term, even hiring Bush-era MSHA chief Lauriski as a consultant.

Safety advocates say Massey has an opportunity with Blankenship's departure to change the company's image.

Yet they worry that once the impact of the Upper Big Branch disaster wears off, the coal industry will again find a way to unravel the effort to beef up enforcement.

"They will. They always do, until someone gets killed again," said Stanley Sturgill, an MSHA inspector who retired last year.

Quote of the week

"Be curious always! For knowledge will not acquire you; you must acquire it."

Sudie Back
(USA Clinical Psychologist)



Wednesday 5 January 2011

USA: COSH Names Top 10 Workplace Tragedies for 2010

Extract from EHS Today, USA

The year 2010 was a bad one for workers: An explosion on a an off-shore drilling rig killed 11 workers and triggered the worst oil spill in U.S. history; a catastrophic mine disaster killed 29 coal miners; and an oil refinery explosion caused multiple fatalities – and those were just the incidents you heard about.

"In 2010, we saw some of the deadliest workplace disasters in recent history," said Tom O'Connor, executive director of the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (COSH), "but the sad fact is, thousands of Americans were killed on the job in accidents that got very little, if any, attention at all. Unfortunately, because Congress failed to act this year on legislation that would have protected American workers, we can expect more of the same next year."

Nearly 5,000 workers died on the job in 2010. Despite their diverse nature, the vast majority of

these accidents – including the incidents that made the top 10, O'Connor said – were easily preventable.

“In most cases, workers at these sites where people were killed were aware that there was something wrong in their workplace,” O'Connor said. “But workers on these and far too many other worksites feared for their jobs if they talked too openly about safety hazards on the job. This year, if we learned nothing else, we learned that when workers lack the security and confidence to speak up about life-threatening hazards on the job, catastrophic incidents are inevitable.”

Unfortunately, O'Connor said, while cases like the Gulf of Mexico explosion and resulting oil spill and the West Virginia mining disaster grabbed the headlines, a quiet epidemic of job fatalities continued throughout the country. Few people heard about the thousands of deaths from falls from roofs, trench cave-ins and other “routine” incidents on jobsites throughout the year.

“The solution to the problem of worker safety in our country is not complex,” O'Connor said. “Fines for serious hazards, currently averaging only about \$400, need to be greatly strengthened. Workers who fear for their safety on the job need to be given real ‘whistleblower’ protections, so that they can warn others about serious hazards without losing their jobs. OSHA needs far more resources in order to be able to inspect workplaces more than once every half-century or so on average, and employers who knowingly and recklessly place their workers’ lives in danger should face more than misdemeanor charges with a maximum sentence of 6 months in jail that current law provides for.”

Top 10 Deadliest Workplace Tragedies

According to COSH, the following workplace tragedies made the top 10 list for 2010:

1. April 20, 2010 – Deepwater Horizon explosion. An explosion at the **Deepwater Horizon** offshore drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico

killed 11 workers, injured 17 others and resulted in the largest oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry. Media reports indicate that management knew key safety equipment had been compromised in earlier incidents, but chose to ignore the significance and continue operations.

2. April 5, 2010 – Upper Big Branch mine explosion, Montcoal, W.Va. An explosion at the **Upper Big Branch** mine in Raleigh County, W.Va., killed 29 workers. The accident represents the worst mining disaster in the U.S. since 1970. Public documents show that the mine’s owner, Massey Energy, has a long record of safety violations at the Upper Big Branch mine.

3. Feb. 7, 2010 – Kleen Energy Power Plant, Middletown, Conn. Contract workers at the **Kleen Energy** plant were performing a “gas blow,” a procedure that uses natural gas at very high pressure to clean pipes of debris. During the process, the gas encountered an ignition source resulting in a massive explosion, killing six workers and injuring 30 others. Following its in-depth investigation, the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB) called natural gas blows “inherently unsafe practices” and called for the immediate ban on the procedure.

4. April 2, 2010 – Tesoro Refining & Marketing Company, Anacortes, Wash. A ruptured heat exchanger at the **Tesoro Refinery** caused an enormous explosion that rocked the plant and killed seven workers. A 6-month long investigation by Washington state OSHA personnel determined that the explosion could have been prevented if the company had carried out proper testing and maintenance of the equipment.

5. Dec. 9, 2010 – AL Solutions Plant, New Cumberland, W.Va. An explosion of undetermined origin killed two brothers working at the plant and injured a third worker. According to media accounts, the AL Solutions plant has earned a reputation as a “dangerous place to work” and the deaths of the two brothers

represent the third and fourth deaths, respectively, at the plant in the last 15 years.

6. March 2, 2010 – Northwest Insulation, Artesia, N.M. Four contractors were installing insulation on top of a new crude storage tank. Workers were welding when a fire ignited. Two workers were injured when they fell while a third remained on top of the tank and was fatally burned. A fourth worker was confirmed dead more than a week later. An OSHA investigation into the cause of the accident is ongoing.

7. May 5, 2010 – Amtec Corporation, Huntsville, Ala. Two workers were killed in a violent explosion at a plant that manufactures rocket fuel. Federal investigators later cited the plant's owners for six serious violations and willfully exposing workers to fire and explosive hazards without proper protection.

8. June 12, 2010 – Top Notch Cleaners, LLC, Valley, Ala. Two employees were buffing floors during the night at a mental health outpatient facility with machines that use propane gas. An employee of the outpatient facility discovered both men dead the next morning. Both the employee and the police who responded to the incident smelled gas when they entered the building where the men were working. Investigators believe carbon monoxide poisoning and inadequate ventilation contributed to the deaths.

9. July 22, 2010 – Horsehead Corp., Monaca, Pa. An explosion at the Horsehead zinc refinery, a facility with a long history of safety violations and OSHA citations, killed a pair of workers and injured two others. Although investigators have still not determined the cause of the blast, the company has a long history of safety violations.

10. July 23, 2010 – Northeast Energy Management Inc., Cheswick, Pa. Two workers engaged in arc welding were burned to death when the tank they were working on exploded, throwing their bodies approximately 60 feet away from the site of the ignition. The explosion and fire that killed the workers was the third

involving Northeast Energy Management since September 2007, when one employee was severely burned in an explosion at a gas and oil well.

O'Connor stressed that national political leadership needs to recognize that, after 40 years, the outdated Occupational Safety and Health Act needs a major overhaul. Only then, he said, can the families of the nearly 5,000 workplace victims in 2010 feel that their loved ones did not die in vain.

USA: MSHA settles 'unprecedented' suit against Massey

Extract from The Charleston Gazette, USA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Federal mine safety regulators reached an 11th-hour settlement Wednesday with Massey Energy that ends what the Obama administration had touted as a landmark suit to shut down an underground coal mine that government inspectors said posed a continuing hazard to workers.

Massey had announced a month after the suit was filed that it would voluntarily close its Freedom Energy No. 1 Mine in Pike County, Ky., and Wednesday's settlement spells out steps the company must follow to do so safely.

Officials from the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration and the Labor Department touted the deal as a major victory for their agencies and for the safety of Massey miners who continue working to shut down and seal the operation.

The case was the first time that MSHA used its 33-year-old authority to seek a federal court injunction against a mine that federal inspectors said posed a continuing hazard to the health and safety of miners.

"This is clearly an unprecedented action," MSHA chief Joe Main told reporters during an afternoon conference call. "It is an historic move forward in terms of the use of this enforcement tool under the mine act."

In a later prepared statement, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis called the settlement "a legal victory not only for the Department of Labor, but for all miners employed by Freedom Energy."

But it was not clear when -- or if -- the government would follow through on earlier promises to file similar lawsuits seeking to put other mining operations under court-supervised safety plans.

Labor Department Solicitor Patricia Smith said two of the three mines her lawyers were considering for such suits have closed, while government officials are still looking closely at the safety record of the third.

"We will use this tool in appropriate circumstances, but we will not use it just to say that we filed for an injunction," Smith said. Earlier in the day, Main told reporters in another conference call that "time will tell" if his agency would pursue more injunction actions.

Smith said MSHA's suit against Freedom Energy has already served as a deterrent, showing the coal industry agency officials are serious about tougher enforcement following the April 5 explosion that killed 29 workers at Massey's Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County.

In the Freedom Energy case, U.S. District Judge Amul R. Thapar in Pikeville has already approved the settlement, which among other things allows the court to maintain jurisdiction over the mine and take action to enforce the terms of the settlement.

Under the deal, Massey is required to follow a detailed plan for the mine closure. The plan includes more frequent safety examinations and requires top mine management officials to sign off on the results of those examinations. It also includes a long list of requirements aimed at keeping safe the roughly 60 miners expected to carry out the task or shutting down the mine and recovering equipment from underground.

"We felt the best course of action was to cooperate with MSHA and jointly develop a plan for our coal miners to safely close the Freedom

Energy mine," said Shane Harvey, Massey's general counsel. "We appreciate MSHA's input and cooperation on the plan and are pleased to have resolved the matter."

Massey had argued that the Freedom mine was not a safety hazard, but also raised legal questions aimed at heading off the government's ability to bring the suit in the first place.

The deal was reached early Wednesday morning, as attorneys for MSHA and Massey were preparing to start a lengthy hearing on the government's request for a preliminary injunction to shut the mine until safety problems there were remedied.

MSHA sued Freedom Energy in early November, citing nearly 2,000 violations over the last two years in which agency inspectors accused the company of failing to clear the mine of excessive coal dust, not properly controlling the mine roof, ignoring requirements for testing and maintaining electrical equipment, and not effectively ventilating the mine.

Since 1977, MSHA has had legal authority to take stepped up enforcement action against mine operators that commit a "pattern of violations." But MSHA has never successfully used that authority, and last year lost a legal challenge to an effort to do so at another Massey mine.

But separate legal language allows MSHA to seek a federal court injunction against mines with repeated violations and where miners are at a continuing risk.

And in December, the judge in the Freedom Energy case handed MSHA a major victory when he upheld the agency's interpretation that - unlike its administrative "pattern of violations" tool -- a court injunction does not require all citations MSHA is using as evidence to have survived company appeals. The judge also ruled for MSHA in finding that the agency did not have to put Freedom Energy on an administrative "pattern of violations" in order to seek relief from the court.

Thursday 6 January 2011

All safe as fire breaks out in NSW coalmine

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

An underground fire has forced the evacuation of a coalmine in the New South Wales Hunter Valley.

The fire broke out behind a longwall seam of Xstrata Coal's new Blakefield south mine, near Broke, at about 7:30pm (AEDT) yesterday.

Fifty-five miners were safely brought to the surface without incident.

Xstrata spokesman James Rickards says the fire is continuing to burn and it is uncertain when the mine will reopen.

"We've yet to determine how that fire has occurred, whether it's spontaneous combustion etc," he said.

"Once we're able to determine what the nature of that fire is then we'll be able to address it appropriately and hopefully get the operation back in form."

Xstrata says all workers have been stood down but will continue being paid until the mine can be safely re-opened.

WA: Mine fire in Tom Price

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

Authorities are trying to determine how a fire started in a bulldozer at Rio Tinto's Tom Price mine site in the Pilbara.



A digger was destroyed in the mine site fire. (Lateline Business)

Rio Tinto says a 50-year-old man has been injured in a fire at its Tom Price mine site in the Pilbara.

The Fire and Emergency Services Authority says the fire started inside a digger last night.

The machinery, valued at about \$3 million, was destroyed.

The man was airlifted to Perth for medical treatment on his injured leg.

No one else was injured.

The exact cause of the blaze is being investigated.

The blaze did not damage anything else.

Kenya: Four miners suffocate to death in goldmine

Extract from The Standard, Kenya

Four miners suffocated to death while two others were rushed to hospital in a critical condition in Nyatike District, Migori County, Kenya after they were trapped in a goldmine.

The miners were trapped after a faulty generator they were using to pump water from an underground gold mine failed and started emitting smoke.

Survivor Agina Arek said: "It would not pump water out of the ground. Several miners went to pump water but when the machine became faulty, some came out, leaving two others underground," said Arek.

Police said they could not immediately establish the type of poisonous gas, though it is assumed to be carbon monoxide.

The first two victims died after choking due to the gas and their bodies were retrieved from the mine. But more tragedy befell them when other miners on a rescue mission succumbed after running out of breath in the Wednesday evening incident.

As the rescuers, were trying to retrieve the bodies, two others collapsed, and died on the spot.

Yesterday, Nyatike MP Omondi Anyanga blamed the disaster on mines, which were abandoned by foreign commercial miners.

"It is a sad situation and we appeal to residents to be cautious and avoid exploring such channels in search of gold. It is killing my people and we need action taken," he said. Mr Anyanga asked National Environmental Management Authority to ensure commercial miners rehabilitated mines to curb accidents and deaths.

Public education

"I appeal to the Provincial administration to consider the plight of the poor families and assist with funeral expenses and public education on such dangers." the MP said.

Arek said as they removed the unconscious miners, the lethal gas affected two rescuers.

"We then came out with the first two bodies and two were unconscious, who we rushed to the hospital," he added.

The gas was lethal, forcing the miners to postpone the retrieving exercise to Thursday morning, when the two remaining bodies were removed. Two other survivors were taken to Nyatike District Hospital, where they were treated and discharged.

Nyatike OCDP Samuel Anampiu said the mine near Aego Shopping centre, is over 150ft deep.

Friday 7 January 2011

NZ: Aussie mine jobs 'hard on families'

Extract from Stuff.co.nz

The families of former Pike River miners forced to take "fly-in" jobs in Australia will struggle to cope, a union says.

Greymouth man Michael Flanagan said about 50 former Pike River miners had provided their CVs for an Australian recruitment company.

Flanagan and four other miners had accepted jobs at a mine near Sydney, while others were also working in Australian mines.

The "fly-in, fly-out" jobs offered annual salaries of \$120,000, with free food and accommodation and free flights, he said.

Some companies were flying the workers back to Christchurch for a nine-day break at the end of a 15-day shift, he said.

Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union national secretary Andrew Little said yesterday Australian mining companies had been recruiting heavily in the wake of the Pike River disaster.

It was "unsurprising" the unemployed miners would take up the lucrative offers, but the men's families would struggle with the absence of husbands and fathers, he said.

"The Australian mining industry is constantly short of skilled miners," he said.

"It's a pity, because there may be few jobs here now but when new opportunities come, it will be harder to recruit them back."

If the men continued to live in New Zealand, the economy would still benefit, he said.

"However, the families may not be able to cope very long with the strain of having their main breadwinner living that kind of schedule and, eventually, they will have to relocate to Australia," he said.

Little said he would be in Greymouth next week to support union members meeting investigators, and to organise legal representation for the union for the Royal Commission into the Pike River mine tragedy.

He would also meet Pike River families, who the union had pledged to support.

Yesterday, the Pike River Families Committee thanked the public and authorities for their support.

Spokesman Bernie Monk, whose son, Michael, 23, died in the mine accident, said the support

had helped family members through an "enormously difficult period".

Canada: Contractor killed in Ontario mining accident

Extract from the Toronto Sun, Ca

TIMMINS, Ont. — A 28-year-old man has died following an accident at a mine in northern Ontario.

The accident occurred shortly before midnight Thursday, on a raise about 7,950 feet underground at the Xstrata Copper Kidd Mine.

Richard Roy, of Chelmsford, Ont., was an employee of J.S. Redpath Ltd., which is contracting firm providing drilling and other services at the mine.

He was taken to Timmins & District Hospital where he died as a result to his injury.

No details have yet been released about the circumstances surrounding his death.

Roy had been employed by J.S. Redpath for more than two years, said Michael Kelly, the company's senior vice-president of operations.

The accident "occurred in one of the newer areas of the Kidd Mine", said David Hansman, senior vice-president of J.S. Redpath in North Bay, Ont.

The area was sealed off for most of Friday while investigators with the Ontario Provincial Police and Ontario Ministry of Labour were at the scene.

Tom Semadeni, general manager at Xstrata Copper Canada's Kidd Operations, issued a statement Friday, saying the death is "a terrible incident.

"We will now concentrate our efforts on supporting all the employees at the mine site and the family of the deceased individual. We will investigate this incident to find out exactly what occurred," Semadeni said.

An internal investigation will be carried out once the accident scene is re-opened, said Louis-

Phillipe Gariépy, corporate spokesman for Xstrata Copper Canada in Montreal.

"We have to understand what kind of work was being done, whether procedures were being followed, who was accountable ... if some appropriate changes need to be made to our procedures to ensure this type of accident never occurs," Gariépy said.

Turkish mines become death traps for 105 in 2010

Extract from Hürriyet, Turkey

Turkey's rapid economic growth brings with it a high amount of workplace accidents in mines, as scores of workers die every year. A total of 105 people died in 61 accidents due to mine explosions and cave-ins last year, according to data from mining engineers. Among European countries, Turkey ranks at top.

A total of 105 miners died due to mining accidents in Turkey last year, according to data released Friday by the Chamber of Mining Engineers and the Turkish Hard Coal Enterprises, or TTK.



Mine explosions, cave-ins and landslide accidents occurred in many Turkish provinces last year and killed more than 100 workers. AA photo

The chamber said the deaths came from 61 mining accidents – 43 of them underground and 18 in open mines.

As mining is a hard and high-risk profession, serious measures should be taken, according to Mehmet Torun, chairman of the chamber.

In terms of global statistics, Turkey ranked third in mining accidents last year, just behind Russia

and India, while it ranked top among European countries. "A total of 48 people died from mining accidents in Turkey in 2008. This figure increased to 92 people in 2009 and 105 people last year," Torun said. "Figures are rising each year. This situation shows authorities' neglect and lack of regulation."

Mine explosions, cave-ins and landslide accidents occurred last year in coalmines in Turkey's provinces Ankara, Balıkesir, Bolu, Edirne, Eskişehir, Giresun, Kütahya, Malatya and Zonguldak. The majority of accidents occurred in coal mines, but many fatal incidents also happened in marble plants, aluminum facilities, stone quarries, zinc facilities and chrome mines.

Cave-ins caused by methane gas explosions in coalmines were the major reason for the fatalities. During such explosions, the temperature can rise to 2,650 degrees Celsius; combined with high pressure, miners are generally killed instantly.

Thousands of deaths in half a century

Most mining accidents in Turkey have occurred in the northern province of Zonguldak, one of Turkey's richest areas in coal.

A total of 2,915 people have died and 326,000 people injured due to mining accidents in Turkey since 1955.

"Investment in job safety, planning, miner training and strict government control should be implemented to decrease the number of accidents," Torun said.

China has become notorious for fatal mining accidents, but according to Torun one has to look into the amount of coal produced to see things in perspective.

"Around 2,500 miners died in China [according to official figures] last year due to accidents," Torun said. "But China is the world's leading coal producer. Only last year, it produced 2.7 billion tons of coal. This figure was 80 million tons in Turkey."

According to these figures, one Chinese worker dies per 1 million tons of coal extracted, while the figure in Turkey is one fatality per 762,000 tons.

Conditions in Turkey and Poland are similar in terms of underground coal enterprises, but the proportion of fatalities in Turkey is four times higher than Poland, Torun said.

The worst mining accident last year in Turkey occurred in TTK's Karadon mine in Zonguldak on May 17. A methane gas explosion caused a gallery to collapse and killed 30 miners. Eleven were saved. The bodies of two miners have yet to be recovered.

The second worst accident was in a private mine in the Dursunbey district of the northwestern province of Balıkesir on Feb. 23 when 17 people died.

Sunday 9 January 2011

USA: Nevada mine deaths increased by 1 in 2010

Extract from the Las Vegas Sun, USA

Statistics from the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration show Nevada had two mining fatalities in 2010, one more than the previous year.

The Elko Daily Free Press reported that 47-year-old Daniel Noel and 38-year-old Ethan Schorr of Spring Creek died in August while working in the ventilation shaft at the underground Meikle Mine.

The mine was run by Barrick Gold Corp.

MSHA hasn't released the final report on the accident at Meikle, but Barrick reported the men were inspecting a large pipe when it fell into the shaft, hitting the cage carrying the two workers.

MSHA figures show Nevada's mine deaths have ranged from zero to nine since 1999.

This week in mining accident history (2)

9 January 1874

Heathery Knowe Colliery

Baillieston, Scotland, UK

Underground coal mine

1 killed by fall in shaft

Source: www.

Mr. George David, 22-year old, Drawer, was killed at the colliery owned by Broom & Brownlie, when he fell from a midworking (from splint to Kiltongue coal).

The shaft where this accident happened is 77 fathoms deep. There are four distinct workings at different levels; three of them are known as mid workings, and are situated as follows :-The first at 22 fathoms from the surface, the second at 35 fathoms, and the third at 65 fathoms. The deceased was a drawer, and worked in the second working, at 35 fathoms from the surface. By the 14th General Rule of the Mines Regulation Act it is provided that "The top and all entrances between the top and bottom of every working or pumping shaft shall be properly fenced, but this shall not be taken to forbid the temporary removal of the fence for the purpose of repairs or other operations if proper precautions are used." And by the special rules of the colliery " the bottomer shall attend during the working shifts in the mine to regulate the number of men who shall ascend on the cage at a time, to keep order among the drawers arriving with loaded hutches at the pit bottom, to see that the loaded hutches are carefully placed on the cage, " &c. It appears that a fence, as provided for by the 14th General Rule, had been constructed at the second working, but was out of use for some weeks before the accident. From some cause the regular bottomer was absent on the morning of the accident, and when the deceased, who was a drawer, approached the pit with a loaded hutch, he unwittingly pushed it into the shaft, and fell to the bottom with it, a distance of 42 fathoms. A neighbouring drawer, who was following close

after him, also pushed his hutch into the shaft, and made a narrow escape in not falling down with it.

If the pit had been fenced, as it ought to have been in terms of the 14th General Rule, the accident would have been prevented ; or if the bottomer had been present, as provided for by the 42nd Special Rule, in all probability this unfortunate occurrence would not have taken place.

The manager and oversman were charged by the Procurator Fiscal with culpable homicide, or culpable violation or neglect of duty, at the Spring Circuit Court, Glasgow. The oversman was found not guilty, and in consequence of the result of his trial the case against the manager was not proceeded with.

[NB The accused were William Forsyth, married, age 51, manager, Heathery Knowe colliery, address: Heatheryknowe (native of St Ninians parish, Stirlingshire) & John Ramsay, married, age: 42, fireman and oversman, Kiltongue pit, Heatheryknowe colliery, address Old Monkland (native of Carmyle). Ramsay was tried at High Court, Glasgow, 27 Apr 1874 - source NAS catalogue]

Monday 10 January 2011

S.Africa: Northam says halt ops after worker dies at mine

Extract from Reuters Africa

JOHANNESBURG - South African mining company Northam Platinum suspended operations at its Zondereinde mine after a worker was killed in an accident, it said on Monday.

Northam, which said the accident happened on Sunday, said it halted stoping operations to investigate the cause of the accident.

"(Northam) may lose up to 1000 PGMs ounces per day from the suspension," said Marion Brower, spokesman for Northam Platinum.

India: Man dies in Curchorem truck mishap

Extract from The Times of India

MARGAO: An unidentified man died on the spot after coming under the rear wheels of a mining truck at Khamamol, Curchorem, Sunday evening.

According to police sources, the deceased is believed to be a migrant in the age group of 30-35 years. The accident occurred on the road leading to the mining jetty.

"It is difficult to ascertain the identity of the deceased as nobody has come forward to identify the body as yet. We couldn't find anything on him either, that could give us any clue about his identity," Curchorem PI Bhanudas Desai said. The driver of the truck has been nabbed by police and further investigations are underway.

USA: MSHA Proposes Proximity Rule

Extract from West Virginia MetroNews

Federal Mine Safety and Health Administration Director Joe Main says too many coal miners die or are injured from underground equipment.

In an effort to reduce the number of casualties connected to equipment failure, MSHA has proposed what is being called the proximity rule.

Main says the issue can no longer be ignored.

"When you look at the number of deaths that have occurred regarding miners being crushed in these underground mines, and you look at the number of miners that have perished this year [2010] in those accidents, I think it's time to act," Main said.

The proximity rule would put sensors on underground machines. If miners got too close to the equipment, it would shut down.

Main didn't give exact specifics on the plan.

"We can't go into the details of what the regulation is going to entail," Main said. "The title

of the rule as it stands is underground compliance."

The proximity rule is just one of 11 new standard MSHA is proposing for the new year.

Main says it takes some time to enact meaningful policy.

"The regulatory process is not something you snap a finger at and you finalize the action tomorrow," Main said. "It's a process that takes time to effectively develop the rule-making action that you're seeking to do."

Other proposals include regulations for impoundment dams, coal mine dust and dust monitors, and operations with a pattern of violations.

The proposals come after 48 deaths in coal mines in the United States during 2010. That's the most since 1992.

Thirty-five miners died while working in West Virginia.

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

A

AIR SHAFT

A shaft used exclusively for conducting air.



An air shaft above a coal mine

-Ed